

Habersham's Kate

BY ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

STANDING in his cabin door, on the cheek of Nigger Head, Habersham could drop a rifle-ball into Tennessee—and sometimes did, just for the fun of it, when the corn whiskey was singing through his veins. A stone's throw away yawned Leifert Gorge, a thousand feet deep, crystal clear to its bottom at noon, purple at twilight, and of a morning spewing up swirling, twisted banners of mist, as from a goblin caldron below. To the south, league on league, stretched Peachtree Valley, up which one could watch the thunderstorms marching like an army of giants, their frowning brows diademed with lightning, and their huge bulk swathed in streaming robes of rain.

From this point one glimpsed the lovely valley between two promontories, like a fair and dimpled bosom behind a loose corsage. Once upon a time, long years before, when he had first fled from that civilization in which he had proved a failure, Habersham's studious gray eyes daily turned to this scene. But now his eyes were watery; and often, very often, so glassy as to convert the prospect into a mere blur; and his small, shapely, womanish hands—moulded by nature, it would seem, for the pen or the brush rather than the rifle and the plough—were beginning to shake, even at their familiar task of tilting jug into tin cup.

As he now leaned against the cabin, his two daughters appeared in the steep path, returning from a call on their nearest neighbor half a mile below. Both were black as ravens and of a striking comeliness. But Judith, the elder, was plump, with a leisurely step, and a complacent, half-sensual face. Kate was as compact and clean-cut as a sparrow-hawk; and, judging from her sensitive lips and nose, she was as passionate and tempestuous as the mountain storms amid which she had been bred.

She halted near her father's chair.

"Pap, air you goin' to hoe that cawn to-day or air you *not*?" she demanded, imperiously, but half affectionately.

"One or t'other, baby," answered Habersham, calmly, with his forefinger in the bowl of his clay pipe.

Judith laughed half contemptuously and passed into the house; but Kate eyed her delinquent sire with all the sternness which a seventeen-year-old girl can muster.

"If you don't make a cawn crap this season, pap, your baby goes barefooted this winter."

Habersham took a reflective puff. "Lemme see your foot-gear, hon."

Kate instantly hoisted a narrow, shapely, but shabbily shod foot to the paternal knee.

"Your best?"

"My best and only."

"I'll hoe, babe—the fust thing to-morrow mawnin'."

"Hoe to-day, pap—hoe ten rows to-day," she pleaded.

Habersham hesitated. He had just enough moonshine in him to produce a delicious languor, and he was loath to dissipate it at the end of a hoe-handle.

"Hon, I'll hoe to-day if you'll do sunthin' fer me. Will you?"

"Tell me first."

"Babe, I'll hoe if you'll quit keepin' kempany with Bark Swinton. Promise me you won't go up on the mounting no more to see him. He's a good feller, I know; but sence he killed Blue Kemper he's had to hole up in the mounting like a ground-hawg. And—though I hate to say it, honey—them Kempers will git him, sooner or later, sure. They's five of 'em left yet, not countin' the old man, and *he* kin still singe a squirrel's whiskers at eighty yards. Bark can't never come back to the neighborhood no more. He dassent even sneak down hyere to see you no



Drawn by Lucius Wilcott Hitchcock

more, sence they got to layin' fer him so clost. You have to go to see him. You oughtn't to do that. Ladies hadn't oughter go a-co'tin'. 'Tain't nice. People will talk. Will you promise, baby?"

Kate's thin red lips curled in a scornful smile. "Pap, you mean all right. But you needn't hoe no cawn to-day—or to-morrow—or ever, if that's your price."

She passed into the house. The old man tranquilly fumbled for a match. "A good 'eal like her mammy in some ways," he murmured to himself.

The Habersham sisters did not live in exemplary amity. Kate resented Judith's assumption of authority, and Judith was jealous of Kate's popularity among the young men. She lacked Kate's biting wit in a quarrel, but, as an offset, she had acquired an almost diabolical skill in dropping sparks into her sister's gunpowdery temper. Hence explosions were frequent.

For their call this afternoon, Kate had purchased the coveted privilege of wearing Judith's breastpin by promising to darn Judith's stockings. She kept her promise, as always; but when Judith inspected the hasty job the next day, after dinner, her wrath flamed. She returned to the kitchen for the purpose of imparting her sentiments to her shiftless sister, but was just in time to see Kate's willowy figure disappear in a thicket of spruce a hundred yards up the mountainside.

"Goin' a-co'tin'?" sung out Judith, tauntingly.

Kate instantly reappeared, and came bounding down the steep incline like a mountain-sheep, until with a final leap she landed at the kitchen door. She was pale and shaken with passion.

"Jude," she gasped, fiercely, "if you ever call out agin like that to me, with them Kempers, for all you know, a-layin' in the bresh waitin' to track me to Bark—if you ever do that agin I'll *kill* you. Because *that's* what they'd do to Bark."

For the second or third time in her life, Judith was afraid of her sister. "I never thought about the Kempers," she answered, apologetically.

"You think the next time," admonished Kate, ominously.

She started off again, but this time in the opposite direction, by way of the front

door. After following the rude wood-road for a quarter of a mile, she struck into the forest and circled back and up until she reached a hollow tree containing a chunk of bacon and one of her father's old hats half full of eggs. Laden with these, she continued in an indirect, meandering course up the mountain, through beds of moss ankle-deep and thickets of hazel which slashed viciously at her face, and over beds of broken rock—to the still further demoralization of her only pair of shoes. Occasionally she crossed a gully on a fallen tree, and once she fearlessly scaled a narrow ledge where a single false step would have dashed her to death. But it was a common feat with her, and no thought of peril crossed her mind.

Her progress was almost noiseless; yet, at intervals, she paused for as long as five minutes, standing motionless, with her spare breast rising and falling from her exertions, but bending an ear as alert as a wood-mouse's for any sound of pursuit.

The sun was still an hour high when she reached the eastern flank of Nigger Head, but the rugged ravine into which she shortly turned was already swathed in twilight. She had not proceeded far, though, after whistling a whippoorwill call, before her eyes brightened at sight of a little fire under an overhanging rock. There were other evidences of a human presence, such as a coffee-pot, a pile of roasting-ears, and two dead squirrels swinging from a limb. But Kate had sat by the fire for ten minutes before Bark Swinton, with his rifle in the hollow of his arm, stepped from a neighboring thicket. Unsleeping vigilance was now the price of his life. At the sound of his sweetheart's warning bird-call he had slipped into cover, and did not emerge again until certain that no enemy had dogged her steps.

She kissed him eagerly, almost ecstatically, and her lithe form clung to his for a moment. But this single demonstration over, she set to getting supper as calmly and systematically as a housewife of many years. She husked half a dozen of the roasting-ears—one for herself, five for Bark. She drew his frying-pan from a fissure in the rock, inspected it critically, and sent him to a neighbor-

ing spring for water. By the time he got back she had dressed the squirrels—as a surprise, for this was his work.

Bark Swinton did not look the part of a hunted man whose flame of being might be snuffed out at any moment from ambush, and whose home was little better than the lair of a catamount. He who conquers the fear of death also conquers, by the same magnificent stroke, all the fears of life. As he lay on a mat of hemlock boughs, propping his head with his forearm and watching his sweetheart's nimble movements, a broad grin illuminated his thin, boyish features. He was happy. No cozy fireside with glowing backlog and steaming kettle, and perchance a cradle in the corner, could have given him a keener sense of domesticity.

When the coffee had come to a boil and the squirrels had turned a golden brown and the corn was emitting a delicious aroma, they sat down, cross-legged, on the clean rock, with the viands between them. As Bark filled his stomach Kate filled his almost equally hungry ears with neighborhood doings. Nothing was too trivial to be reported, not even Barney Blake's purchase of a new jack-knife down at the Notch. Bark wanted to know how much it cost, how many blades it had, and whether the handle was wood or horn.

"I know the knife," said he, with a laugh. "And it's a good one. But Barney never paid no dollar fer it. Man-lake offered it to me, once, fer sixty cents. But I didn't have the sixty." And again he laughed.

But after supper, when his pipe was going, his spirits seemed to subside and the conversation flagged. Kate was quite content without talk; as with him, so with her—just to be near was enough. But after a little she discerned something amiss.

"What makes you so still, dear?" she asked.

He smiled reassuringly, but the smile was a little forced. "I was thinkin', honey. Honey, I got one thing to tell you and one thing to ask you." He paused, with a grave, half-troubled face, and took a puff or two. "Honey, I killed Baird Kemper this afternoon about three o'clock."

Spill enough blood and it becomes as cheap as rain-water. Make the rifle the

arbiter of justice, and its decrees are accepted in the same faith as those of the most venerable chancellor in the land. Swinton's tender listener did not recoil or cry out in horror. She simply turned pale and looked at him with startled eyes.

"Have they found your hiding-place?"

"No. I had drapped down to the valley to glean them roastin'-ears, thinkin' you might come up to-night. I was jest crossin' the road north of Sam Burt's, when Baird riz up in a patch of cow-peas and took a plug at me. He creased me there." He pushed back his long, black hair and exposed a narrow, straight red mark across his temple. "It guv me a bad headache. I got it yet."

Kate crept to his side, and laying her lips to the burnt place, began to cry softly. "You promised me you wouldn't go down agin."

"To the Notch, honeykin," he protested. "And I ain't went since. But ef you don't want me to I won't even go down to the valley no more. It gits powerful lonesome up lyere sometimes, though. Sometimes I want to screech, jest to hear somethin'. Sometimes I *do* screech, though 'tain't right fer a man in hidin'." He paused, stroked her cheek, and pulled hard at his pipe. "What I wanted to *ask* you, Kate, was this. Mebbe you'll be surprised. Kate, will you marry me now, without makin' me wait till I kin come down to the neighborhood agin?"

She did not lift her head from his shoulder, and she was silent so long that the hope died out of his face. "And keep house in a cave?" she asked, so quietly that his waiting heart leaped.

"Yes—in a cave. Why not? Why, a cave's warmer than any house," he ran on, eagerly, "and I know one that's as dry as powder. You'd love that cave, honey; it's a sweetener, and so big you kin stand up in it. No winders to wash and no floors to scrub. Wouldn't you like that? But," he added, more calmly, "we could build a shack if you'd sooner. Only a shack's more dangerous. It's easier to find."

Again Kate was silent, with her black eyes fixed upon the fire. His proposition had startled her; at the same time it had fired her daring imagination. How

much, after all, was he asking her to give up? Did not the Bible say that a dinner of herbs and contentment therewith was better than a stalled ox? At home she had neither contentment nor the ox. There was her father, to be sure, whom she loved and who loved her in his way. But nothing, not even her marriage to Bark Swinton, could worry him long. A few extra pulls at his omnipresent jug and his equilibrium would be restored. Yet—and this prolonged her silence—to marry an outlaw was a bold thing to do. It would make an outlaw of herself, socially, and her feminine nature shrank from outraging public opinion.

"What would people say, Bark?" she asked, finally.

"Nothin' wuss than they're sayin' about *me*, I reckon—and you know I didn't pick this quarrel. People air jest as liable to talk about you when you're right as when you're wrong. But I wasn't thinkin' about people; I was thinkin' about *us*. It will take me some time to kill the Kempers off"—she shivered in his arms—"and I can't go down till I do. Or till they kill me, in which case I'll go down in a wooden overcoat, which ain't a proper bridegroom suit."

"Don't, don't!" she whispered.

"Tain't the lonesomeness hyere I care fer especially. And I ain't afeard of *them*. If they git a bead on me they'll do fer me what I done fer Baird to-day—and he never knew what struck him. But if they only winged me and I crawled off to a thicket, but without stren'th to forage— You see, if you and me was married, and I didn't turn up at our cave at night you'd look me up."

He bent his earnest eyes down to hers, and she divined the thing that oppressed him—not death, but the degradation, the squalor, of starving, like a broken-backed rabbit, and rotting in a bush. In the face of this feeling, how mean, how contemptible, was her thought of what people would say! She tightened her grasp on his hand, but before she could speak, he continued, apologetically:

"I jest thought, honey, that if *you* was up hyere and *I* was down yander and I loved you as I do—"

But she threw herself upon his bosom and stopped his speech with her hot lips.

"Don't you dare!" she panted. "You know—you know I love you! And you know I'll marry you!"

They named the day—the following Saturday, and this was Tuesday. Kate was to get the license late in the afternoon on Saturday, in order that the secret might not leak out and get to any of the Kempers' ears. She would invite the preacher to supper that night, and at twelve o'clock the groom would steal down the mountain and claim his bride.

To avoid exposing him unnecessarily, Kate usually insisted on leaving the rendezvous as she came, alone. But tonight, claiming an indulgence in honor of the occasion, Bark accompanied her two-thirds of the way home. She was perfectly fearless, but when he kissed her good-by she flung her arms around his neck, to his surprise, and trembled violently.

"Oh, Bark, I'm afeard of Baird's ghost!" she whimpered.

"His ghost don't carry no gun, which *he* did," answered Bark, practically. "Howsomever, I'll take you clean home." And despite her frantic entreaties—for on all the mountain no more dangerous spot existed for him than the vicinity of Habersham's house—he led her to her door.

She waited anxiously on the step until, from far above, in the silent night, there floated down the weird call of a whippoorwill, three times repeated. Then she entered the house, undressed in the dark, and slipped into bed beside her sister as lightly as a bird returns to its nest. Her care was not to awaken Judith, in which case there would be forthcoming, in all probability, a lecture on the disgracefulness of these nocturnal trysts. In her present tender, high-strung mood, Kate could hardly have borne a scolding.

The lecture came in the morning at breakfast. But Kate was so docile, so non-resistant, that Judith finally paused suspiciously.

"If you air through," then said Kate, sweetly, but with a triumphant flash of her eye, "I'll tell you something. Me and Bark air going to be married—next Saturday—in this house—at twelve o'clock at night."

There was no parrying such a tremendous blow as this. Judith sat speech-

less. Old Habersham hastily left the table, lit his pipe outside, and swore feebly and ineffectively to himself for fifteen minutes. Then he began to chuckle, for he could never maintain anger long against his baby.

"The way she put Jude out o' business was sure a caution!" he murmured, hilariously. "And I don't know, anyway, that it's anybody's business who she marries but her own."

One of the religious revivals which periodically sweep the Nigger Head settlements, like a fiery, chastening cloud, was at this time in progress at Mount Moriah Church, some two miles from the Habershams'. That night the sisters, although as indifferent to church observances as a pair of Hunnish princesses, walked down to the meeting. The mountaineers, craving an event in their almost eventless lives, and hungry for even simple contact with their kind, had been flocking to the church for weeks from miles around. Thin, flat-breasted women, whose strength appeared hardly sufficient for their daily drudgery, came on foot with a baby in their arms, and one or two youngsters perchance clinging to their skirts. The men usually came by themselves, and frequently as early as four o'clock in the afternoon. The explanation of the last two facts was found in the multiplicity of jugs secreted in the second growth which bordered the clearing, and in the number of flat-topped stumps which could be impressed into service as card-tables. All evidence of this, however, vanished when the evangelist hove in sight.

The Habersham girls arrived in time for the last half-hour of this social session. The flirtatious Judith soon had half a dozen young bucks around her; but Kate, usually the brighter star of the two, remained in the background, preoccupied and grave. Her thoughts were far above, among the thick pines, to which she occasionally lifted her eyes.

There was just one person present to whom she paid any attention. The evangelist, who was moving about and shaking hands with everybody, was curiously repellent to her. He was a giant in size, with great hairy hands and sunken blue eyes, ordinarily as dull as

a fish's, but which Kate had seen ablaze with an almost uncanny incandescence. In him she had instantly recognized an antagonistic force—something opposed to all her practices and principles. He was a celibate, and she fancied that he could ruthlessly grind a woman's heart beneath his heel; so that in his presence the image of that other man up on the mountain, of whom she had been cuddling tender thoughts in her breast all day, seemed to grow dim, to recede into the summit's mist, to become a mere phantom. Hence when the evangelist, spying the sisters with his cavernous but all-seeing eyes—having been tipped off, no doubt, as to their woful spiritual condition—came forward and shook hands, Kate's knees actually shook; and as soon as she could do it undetected she vigorously wiped his clammy touch from her palm. Judith, on the other hand, looked him calmly in the eye and, when he murmured something about the welfare of her soul, snickered impudently.

Yet profoundly as he had affected Kate in the open air, his personality seemed to double or treble its power upon his entering the pulpit. Outside he was an equal, here he was master. His smile fell off like a mask, and he became the stern, unrelenting prophet of a wrathful God. Standing with one arm on the battered old Bible, he gravely watched the crowd file in, the men surrendering their weapons at the door, the women storing their sleeping babes under the pews or in the aisles—for seats were at a premium—and the dogs being kicked out or driven into inconspicuous corners. Then, when all was still—and his dominating eyes hastened the moment—he gave out a hymn.

"I want every man, woman, and child in the house to join in singing this hymn. If I see a pair of motionless lips, I'll assume that the party wants to sing a solo, and I'll give him a chance to do it by inviting him out."

Everybody sang. A dozen hymns were galloped through in rapid succession, waxing louder each time, until the windows fairly shook. By this time the congregation was warmed up. Then the evangelist, himself warmed by having beaten time with arms and body and shouted the initial word of each chorus

before anybody else could take it, launched out on his harangue. Again the master manipulator of men, with an upward fling of his long arms, started a familiar, sonorous hymn; but quickly leaving the singing to the congregation, he shouted at intervals, with melodramatic effect: "Amen! Halleluliah! Praise the Lamb! Another soul snatched from hell! Another knot in the devil's tail!" When he ended, there was a perfect babel of shouts, groans, and cries for mercy, interlarded with the squalls of frightened babies and the barking of excited dogs.

Kate, as high-strung as any wild thing of the woods, suffered keenly. She felt no conviction of sin, but she was oppressed, stunned, stricken with a hysterical fear. The despairing cries of one woman in particular cut her to the heart, and the sight of an old man laid out on the platform, in the deathlike, cataleptic trance called the "power," fairly froze her blood. She glanced appealingly at her sister. Judith's face was as impassive as an Indian's, and her cold blue eyes betrayed no stronger emotion than curiosity, tinged with contempt. Then once more came the commanding voice, loud and clear, like the trump of Gabriel, rising above all the demoniac noise:

"Is there another? Is there another? Is there not one more here who will drink of the blood of the Lamb before the cup is taken from his lips forever?—for you may die to-night. The gates of heaven are open, the admission is only a confession of sin. Come before they close, and the angel, from a turret of gold, calls out, 'Too late! Too late!' Is there not a woman here whose heart troubleth her, whose soul cries out against her flesh? None? None? My friends, yesterday a man was killed, a soul was hurled into eternity without one instant in which to cleanse itself for meeting its Maker. You know the slain, you know the slayer. Are you all guiltless? Have none of you, for the sake of a fleshly love, succored the murderer and made yourself a party to the crime? If so, come and wash the blood from your hands, before it is too late—too late—too late!"

Every one knew at whom this shot was aimed, and a hundred pairs of eyes were

instantly fastened on Kate—quite half of them in sympathy. A curious obsession was upon her. She saw nothing but the evangelist's accusing eyes, magnified to the dimension of saucers; heard nothing but his sepulchral "Too late! Too late!" Quite unconsciously she arose.

"Set down, you fool!" commanded Judith, in an angry whisper, plucking her sister's skirt.

But Kate neither heard nor felt, and with bowed head and alabaster face walked slowly down the aisle. The altar had long since been filled and the approaches thereto choked with kneeling penitents. But the evangelist, recognizing this last brand from the burning as no mere piece of foxwood glowing with a heatless fire, leaped from the platform and with arms and voice unceremoniously cleared a place for her. Then turning the meeting over to an assistant, he knelt at the fair mourner's side and labored with her long and earnestly.

Sleep was long in coming to Kate that night. She lay on her back for hours, motionless and soundless, with wide, shining eyes, which occasionally overflowed with tears. At times it seemed as if she *must* throw herself upon Judith's bosom and relieve herself of the upward-rushing sobs. But, clenching her hands over her convulsively lifting breast, she stoically waited for the pain to pass. Along toward morning she fell into a troubled sleep.

The next day Judith felt pretty certain that Bark Swinton had lost his sweetheart. Kate said nothing, however, and went about her work as usual. Her occasional wet eyes and trembling lips were the only outward signs of the volcanic disturbance within. Likewise the next day. But by Saturday noon Judith had concluded that she was entitled to a declaration of her sister's intentions, and to that end she used a little art.

"Do you want me to bake your cake, Sis?" she asked.

"There'll be no cake, Judy—and no wedding." Kate's voice was gentle, but the wild light in her eyes touched Judith.

"Marry Bark, if you want to, Kate. Don't let that lantern-jawed sky-pilot skeer you out."

"He didn't try to skeer me, Judy.

He just asked me to give Bark up. Not for my sake, nor even for Christ's sake alone, but for *his* sake—to save *him* from hell.”

Judith was sceptical, and was about to assail the preacher's logic, when Kate, with an uncontrollable sob, ran out of the room.

Yet that night she awaited Bark's coming with a strange apathy. She had thought and thought and thought until her brain was numb. The justification of her course was not exactly plain to herself; how could she hope to make it plain to him? There was, therefore, just one thing to do—announce the fact, how before the storm of grief or wrath which would follow, and let events take their course. What that course was made little difference to her now. Should Bark try to kill her, she would make no resistance.

She sat by the kitchen fire, for the mountain nights were cool, even at this season. But a little before twelve she slipped out to the back door-step. A bridegroom would be on time, if not ahead of it!

But he was not on time, strangely enough. Half past twelve—one—half past one! The suspense became unbearable. What but sickness or death could have detained him to-night? The image of a dead man, lying on his back, with his face up to the starlight, tortured her weary mind, until at last she threw a light shawl over her shoulders and started up the mountain. The preacher and all his words were far from her now. Bark was in trouble.

Quaking at every log or stump which resembled a prostrate man, she circled and climbed for an hour and a half, until she reached Bark's ravine. No camp-fire greeted her eyes this time, and she had expected none. The ashes, moreover, were cold and damp, as if several days old. More ominous still was a grouse which hung from the limb which Bark jokingly called his "ice-box." The bird was already beginning to smell, and Kate's hands grew as cold as its stiff, dead toes.

Where, in all the square miles of forest-clad Nigger Head, should she look for him? There was a great rock, an infinitesimal part of the Nigger's nose, on which Bark loved to lie and sun himself, with the lizards, while he watched the

clouds, like fleecy cattle grazing in the turquoise meadows of the sky. Kate had sat there once with him, and she had seen the old bald eagle which had bred in the mountain for many years pass by, far, far below, on his return from the distant valley, where a lamb could occasionally be picked up for the hungry ones at home. Thither she now bent her steps. But when she had clambered to the top, breaking her finger-nails, between haste and darkness, his body was not there. And more than his body she did not now expect to find.

While she stood in uncertainty as to her next move, the first gray light of dawn began to wash the heavens. She waited till it had percolated through the tree-tops and made visible the aisles of the forest, and then started off again—heavily and aimlessly. But she had gone scarcely two hundred yards when a form—though all that she saw was the white face—seemed to rise out of the ground before her, as if a grave were giving up its dead. She screamed in terror, for the face was Bark's; but he waved his hand and called out to her reassuringly.

"Honey, it's only me! Don't be afeard. I knowed you'd come, as sure as there's a God in heaven."

She could not speak, but in answer to her questioning eyes he swept away the moss and leaves which yet half buried him, and held up his right leg. Clinging to the ankle, with the tenacity of a giant crab, was a steel bear-trap; and attached to the trap was a log-chain which, half concealed by leaves, led to a huge staple in an adjoining tree.

"I couldn't pull myself away from this pleasant spot, honey, even to go down the mounting and git married," observed Bark, facetiously, evidently with the intention of breaking the spell which held her.

But she could not smile, and her horrified eyes leaped from his wan face to his swollen foot and back again. Yet, when he added, still gayly, "Air you studyin' whether to loose sich a keercless lover or not?" she sprang forward with a little cry of self-reproach.

The trap had defied its victim's efforts to release himself from the fact that with his free foot he could depress only one of the two powerful springs; and he



"I'LL BE THAR," SHE SAID, FERVENTLY

could do this only from an upright position, which prevented his tying the spring down and easing the pressure on his captured leg. With an assistant, however, even a frail girl, the problem was simplified. After making a noose of the sling-strap of his gun, Bark bent his knee so that the trap rested flat upon the

ground. Under his direction, Kate then knelt upon one of the springs; and as it slowly receded under her combined weight and the grip of one hand, she tightened the slip-noose to retain the advantage she had gained. When the recalcitrant steel was at last overcome and securely bound down, she cut off the free

end of the strap, and with it Bark made a second noose for the other spring. Then, when it too had been rendered harmless, Kate, with shrinking fingers, took hold of the now relaxed jaws of the ugly man-catcher. As the cruel teeth, under her gentle manipulation, released him, she shuddered and glanced pityingly into her lover's face. He had fainted.

Cool enough now, under responsibility, she swiftly removed her muslin petticoat, tore it into strips for bandages, ran to a rivulet a hundred yards away, and filled her sweetheart's hat with water. She sprinkled his face until he opened his eyes, and then washed the wound and bound it up. This done, she sat down beside him, and taking him in her arms, she almost fiercely pressed his head to her breast and laid her cheek upon his matted hair, so horribly like a dead man's. Meanwhile the tears ran freely down her face.

But Bark was soon himself again—at least his talk was evidently designed to make her think so.

"I stepped into that thar thing Wednesday mawnin'," he explained, and he could feel her heart throb, for this was Sunday morning. "I took it that the Kempers had sot it fer me, and that's why I buried myself. Not secin' me, you understand, honey, when they come to look for their game, they would nachally come on up to make sure that no coon or anything had sprung the trap. That would be my chance. If there was only one, I counted on risin' up quick and gittin' him sure. If there was two, I had a fair chance of gittin' 'em both, takin' 'em by surprise that way. If there was three, I thought I *might*—one chance in ten—git 'em all. I wanted to make my funeral just as expensive as possible."

"But they didn't come, darling! Mebbe they didn't set it, after all."

"No, they didn't come," he answered, with a hoarse, unnatural laugh. "Shootin' me, honey, even from behind a tree, when I'm fast in a b'ar-trap, is attended with more or less resk. I reckon they decided that if they'd caught me they'd jest let me die and rot. It was safer."

"Poor boy! Nothing to eat for four days!" she murmured, pityingly.

"Oh, I've et! Fer fear they'd come,

I laid in the hole mostly all day Wednesday. But early Thursday mawnin' I foraged some. That chain's ten foot long. That give me a twenty-foot circle. That mawnin' I found three mushrooms, forty-three chinquapins, and three common acorns. And on Friday I had a feast. I had a squirrel!" He laughed at her incredulous look. "Yes; I heerd him early, but it took me about two hours to call him up. Then, after he got hyere, I knowed there wasn't any use to shoot him unless he'd fall in reach. So I had to wait till he got on my tree. Honey, I waited five hours, gittin' hungrier every minute! He'd come and go, come and go, foragin' for hisself. But he was so cur'us, it appeared, to find out what that thing was down there in the leaves that kept a-barkin' that he couldn't give it up. Then finally he hops on my tree, and runs out on that limb yander, a-whiskin' his tail, and peepin' over the edge, and a-barkin'. Then the girl hyere"—glancing at his rifle—"done a little barkin' herself. I bored him through the head—that was all I could see—and that squirrel just rolled off the limb and fell plump in my lap. Then I made a fire out o' leaves and moss and cooked him. Leastways I het him through. Can't say he was done to a turn, like them of yours, last time you was up, honey."

She hugged him again. To get him to a place of safety and then speed down the mountain for food was the next thing to do. Yet not quite the next.

"Dearie, if I marry you, will you move over to *Tennessee*, and quit killin' folks, or givin' them a chance to kill you?"

"Why, honey, what put that in your head?"

"Will you?"

The mountaineer loves his mountain as a beast loves its lair. Hunt him even, and he, like the stag, will circle upon his trail until he returns to the cover from which he started. Bark was silent a moment; then he smiled.

"I reckon I will, honey, if you're so sot on it. I reckon it don't make no difference to me where I live, Ca'lina or *Tennessee*, as long as you're thar."

"I'll be thar," said she, fervently.